WHITE SOULS
Ayesha Gohar

WHITE SOULS

By

Ayesha Gohar

ORIENTS SOCIAL RESEARCH CONSULTANCY
(OSRC)
(SMC-PRIVATE) Ltd.

@ All Rights Reserved …..

Title : **White Souls**
Author : **Ayesha Gohar**
Volume-I : November 2024
Layout : Sajjad Innovations, Gujranwala.

Publisher : Orients Social Research Consultancy
(OSRC) (SMC-PRIVATE) Ltd.
263-FF, Street 233, Wafay City
City Housing Society, Gujranwala.
Tel: +92-300-9644467
Email : info@osrc.org.pk

Price Rs. : **600**

ISBN : 978 969 281 05 8

Stockist

MAJEED BOOK DEPOT
Sunny Center, Main Market Satellite Town, Gujranwala.

For my parents, whose love and support have been my greatest strength. Their endless sacrifices and encouragement have made this journey possible. This book is for you, with all my heart.

Meet the Author

Ayesha Gohar, a distinguished poetess from Pakistan, with her previously published book titled *Miles n Smiles*, has now ventured into the realm of short story writing. Currently, she is pursuing her Bachelor's in English Language and Literature at the University of Lahore, Lahore, to further enhance her literary skills. Her unwavering dedication to English literature and creative writing has earned her a multitude of certificates for attending, organizing, and hosting conferences and literary events. Her works have been featured in numerous magazines and anthologies. Ayesha is also an alumna of the prestigious English Access Microscholarship Program, a fully-funded initiative by the U.S. Embassy. In her latest book, she skillfully portrays a collection of tragic love stories, exploring the depths of human emotions and the complexities of love and life.

C O N T E N T S

1-	Broken Vows	7
2-	A Hidden Diary	14
3-	Pain-ting	21
4-	Tears of Yesterday	31
5-	Wasted Hope	40
6-	Unwritten Ending	45
7-	Echoes in the Fog	54
8-	A Dark Sun	58

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

As I pen down these words of gratitude, I am acutely aware of the fact that this collection of short stories would not have come to fruition without the support and inspiration of many wonderful people. First and foremost, I would like to thank my parents for keeping me motivated throughout this journey. I am especially grateful to my father, whose unwavering support and guidance have been my anchor. His dedication to his craft and belief in perseverance inspired me to pursue my dreams with confidence. To my mother, her boundless love and encouragement have been a constant source of strength, reminding me to keep up my creativity and stay true to myself.

A huge thanks to my friends for their unwavering encouragement and patience. Their belief in me has been a constant source of motivation. Each of them contributed in shaping these stories in ways I could not have achieved alone.

I am also indebted to my editor, whose meticulous attention to ideas and his thoughtful suggestions greatly improved this collection. His dedication and expertise were crucial in bringing these stories to life.

Lastly, I want to express my gratitude to my readers. Their support and enthusiasm would be the greatest rewards a writer could hope for. Thanks to all of them for being part of this journey and for making this book possible.

Ayesha Gohar

Broken Vows

It was the mid of June. Sarah's head throbbed with pain. She lay in a couch. She was trying to immerse herself in a book.

She stopped reading and rose slowly. Rustam was in the hall; attempting to hang a picture of them—their wedding photo. Sarah pretended to ignore and walked toward the kitchen. She drank some water before she returned to her room, where she found Rustam leaning against the wall and gazing at the painting. He had a satisfying expression, as if he were bragging about his achievement. She paused, then walked back to her room.

Settling in her couch, she attempted to read once more, but Rustam entered the room, opting not to disturb her. Her eyes remained fixed on the pages, but her thoughts lingered on the wedding photo. Horrible memories from the past flashed through her mind.

"Everything seems like an illusion. Perhaps this is a horrible dream, and someday someone will wake me up, and everything will be all right," she murmured to herself.

It was a forced marriage. Rustam had been in love with Sarah for a long time, but she was blissfully unaware of his feelings. There was another man, Shayaan who loved Sarah. She loved him too. They were in love and seemingly

perfect for each other. They used to meet frequently, shared countless conversations. Her driver would drop her off at restaurants where Shayaan would arrive on his motorcycle.

There was a significant disparity between their familial status. She was from an upper middle class, while Shayaan was from a lower middle class. Sarah knew well that such a difference would not be easily bridged. Their union was simply impossible. As soon as Sarah learned of that, her family managed her engagement with Rustam. It was a proposal from Rustam's family; he had sent his parents to ask for her hand, but Sarah was oblivious to that. She would have resisted, but there came no such point and enough time to resist. All was quickly, quick and unexpected.

The marriage ceremony was held in a grand hall that reflected the wealth of both of the families. She wept and wept; her eyes got dried and barren. She wanted to reconcile with the situation, but her heart revolted. Her heart felt heavy with every tear that rolled down her cheeks.

After the marriage, she struggled to manage her feelings. The connection between her and Rustam was purely physical. Rustam often sensed the emotional distance between them but couldn't find the right words to bridge the gap.

It was Tuesday morning. She lay in her bed while he was preparing to leave for work. He dressed carefully, tried not to disturb her, and left, giving her a good morning kiss before he departed. She woke up, moved towards Rustam. He smiled softly at the sight of her. Yet, her eyes held a storm of unspoken words.

"I want to talk to you about something," she said.

"Yes? Is everything okay?" he asked, his brow furrowed with concern.

"Can you please come home early?" she requested. His eyes widened in shock; he did not encounter such a situation with her before. Nevertheless, he agreed and headed out.

The previous night was so nasty. She found t difficult to sleep. It had been a month since their marriage. Restlessness haunted her, making sleep elusive. She contemplated, "I should tell Rustam everything! It wouldn't be fair to him otherwise. If he wants to end with a divorce, I will accept it. But he should to know about my emotional state of existence"

Rustam, in his office, stared each file but he was unable to focus. He closed everything and made his way home with swirls of doubts and fears in his mind. "What if she loves someone else? Is she happy with this marriage?"

He tried to convince himself. There may be no bad news awaiting him; maybe she has some good things to share. But dark omens loomed in his mind, and hopes seemed to fade away. "I never asked her if she was happy. I felt a lot, but why didn't ask her if she was contented? Does she look happy?" all the things were mixed up in his mind.

He arrived home, rushed to his room. It was empty. Sarah was in the bathroom. He loosened his tie, slipped off his shoes and socks to make himself comfortable, then settled in the couch to wait for her. Some moments later, she emerged from the bathroom, Rustam's breath choked in his throat. She looked like a beautiful angel, her body was casting a silhouette that blocked the light streaming in from the window behind her. Her dark, wet hair made Rustam forget all his earlier thoughts.

"It hasn't even been an hour since you left. Is everything okay?" Her voice tinged his body with warmth, but his heart was heavy. He moved closer and kissed her forehead, but she recoiled.

"We need to talk," she said. Her voice sliced through the air like a cruel sword. It pierced every inch of his soul.

His mind braced for the inevitable. A sense of foreboding gripped him. Something strange was about to happen—may be something terrible.

A thought struck him; he started searching for the car keys, convincing her to talk in the car. Perhaps a drive would make it less difficult to digest. He could avoid facing those piercing eyes. As she approached the car, she noticed Rustam scribbling something on a piece of paper. He tucked it into his pocket as she climbed in. He started driving. His hands were trembling.

"Can we have it now?" she asked.

"Sure," he replied. His voice strained. She sensed the anxiety hidden beneath his trembling hands, yet she steeled herself, thinking, 'Today or never.'

"I think it's not fair for you or for us to keep life-long secrets. So today, I want to admit that I never loved you. Our marriage was not approved from my side. I never agreed to marry you; circumstances forced me do that."

Sarah stared at her own hands, resting in her lap, while Rustam's hands continued to tremble. Meanwhile a stream of tears was rolled down his cheeks.

She continued, "I don't feel comfortable with you because I was not meant for you. Your love never brought me

happiness. That is none of your fault; it's all mine. I never deserved you."

She paused for a moment to collect her thoughts.

"I loved someone before you, and I couldn't overcome that feeling even after marrying you. It's entirely my fault but with no control of mine. "

As soon as Rustam heard those words, he jerked the car to an abrupt halt in the middle of the road and buried his face in his hands.

"I'm so sorry, but I can't live with you anymore." She whispered.

He remained silent, reaching into his pocket. He retrieved the note and slid it onto Sarah's lap. It lay there as he started the car again. They were on the wrong side of the road. Sarah reached forward for a tissue. Rustam was driving recklessly, and a tear blurred his vision. As Sarah began to open the note, she read its contents. As she reached the last word, she noticed that the car was losing balance. Rustam glanced at her for a second. Meanwhile, a speeding car collided with theirs, smashed the side where he was sitting.

Sarah fainted.

"*This heart that vibrates for you, and my eyes are only meant to see you. My soul is relieved only by your presence. I don't want anything except you. If I ever find myself in a situation where I find you no more, Sarah, I pray those breaths be my last."*

She heard Rustam's voice whispering in her ear. "The note!" she thought. She struggled to open her eyes but felt a

jolt of pain shooting through her body. It was the note he had slipped onto her lap.

What happened next? She tried to remember, her eyes flew open.

She found herself in a bright white room, lights were pinching her eyes. She attempted to recognize the hospital room until her mother entered with hushed cries and tears. She caressed Sarah's hair. Sarah murmured, "Rustam, where is he?"

Her mother struggled to console her. "The doctors tried very hard, but his injuries were severe." She paused. "They couldn't save him." Her voice broke again as she burst into tears. "He is no longer with us, Sarah."

Sarah felt her body jolt, the words hit her like a physical blow.

Tears streamed down her cheeks, pooling on the white pillow beneath her head. Rustam was moved to the room next to hers. She attempted to shift her body but felt pain radiate through her legs, head, and entire frame. Thoughts flashed in her mind, one after another.

"I want to see him!" she insisted.

"But—" her mother said."Please!" Sarah pleaded, with stumbling voice.

She, somehow, managed to reach the room where Rustam's body lay. Every step toward him made her heart sink further. Upon reaching his bedside, she spread her arms and laid partially over him. She felt his body for a fleeting second. A bright light blocked her vision, and everything faded.

"You loved me the way I deserved, Rustam."

The last words slipped from Sarah's lips as everything faded to black. There was nothing left but the two dead bodies of them.

A Hidden Diary

After my appointment as a police officer, that was my first day of the duty. Luckily, death scene was in my neighbourhood. My excitement was at the peak, but it dropped suddenly when I came to know that it was a death issue. A death had occurred in our neighbourhood while I was on duty. The location of the house was just two doors away from mine. Our team got out of the cab, and we went inside. According to the information, no one lived here—only a guy named Faris had been living alone. The house was well-furnished, with everything neatly arranged. I had never seen a house so organized.

The house opened with a hall and an open kitchen on the other side. On the left, there was a study filled with books, showing the person was fond of reading. To the right was a bedroom with an attached bathroom and a large window that opened into a small lawn at the back of the house. The information team told us the death was due to a short circuit. I walked toward the dead body.

We discovered that the kitchen and living area were severely damaged by a fire caused by an electrical short circuit. The area was filled with smoke damage, charred countertop and appliances, including a scorched microwave and toaster, lying in a heap. The victim was found near the kitchen, having suffered severe burns and smoke

inhalation, with noticeable electrical burn marks on his body. His entire body had turned blue with multiple burn patches. His face was badly mutilated, hence unrecognizable. My head spun, but I held myself upright.

Our incharge addressed me, “Zahra, please collect some important items from around the body for the post-mortem.” Post-mortem? I thought. Why a post-mortem! It was a very clear death. Who needs a post-mortem when the body itself tells us it was an accidental death? Still, I started gathering things. I put on my gloves and picked up a plate—a washed plate in the sink. I placed it in a transparent zip-lock. Moving further, I grabbed a comb and preserved it too.

I was in a hurry. I don’t know why, but there was something about the house that was strange. Something like "my fragrance." What am I thinking? My over thinking will cost me a lot one day. Next, I took a bottle of Dior Sauvage perfume and an empty envelope. I couldn’t stand it anymore. I grabbed the items and hurried out to the cab, almost running. As I was leaving the room, I bumped into a table, causing a diary to fall and land open. A sketch on the page caught my eye. I froze, wide-eyed. The sketch left me stunned. I closed the diary, tucked it inside my uniform, and left the place. My head spun for the rest of the day. Somehow, I completed my shift and headed home. Passing that house again haunted me. I reached home, changed, and placed the diary in my drawer before heading to dinner.

I, being the only child of my parents, has special love from them. They loved me deep, I thought, but their conjugal love was deeper. Loving each other as husband and wife wasn't bad at all, but still loving each other like teenagers in their late fifties was something unique. My school and

college friends always quoted my parents' love stories. We started dinner as usual—my dad gave the first bite of his food to my mom. She took it, they smiled, I smiled too, and we began eating. They initiated a small talk about my first day on the job. I told them all about the death scene but did not tell anything about the diary. I finished dinner and went to my room. Mom and Dad were doing the dishes, exchanging love words. I laid down in my bed. Every inch of my body was begging me to sleep, but my mind kept me pulling towards the diary.

I opened my drawer and started reading the first page. It started.

I went for my morning walk and did some exercise. It is part of my daily routine. On the way back home, I saw something very mesmerizing in my street. It completely refreshed my mood. A couple was sitting on a bench, facing the garden. The lady's head rested on the man's shoulder. I could tell that they were in their fifties. I returned home, but their image lingered in my mind throughout the day.

The page ended. I stopped.

Do people still write diaries? I had read about such things in some novels and stories. It was a hobby or a way to kill loneliness, or it may be for data storage. But in our age, there were numerous alternatives. Anyhow, my heart urged me to read more, but my body resisted. I wrapped myself in my blanket, and without another thought, I fell into a deep sleep.

The next day, I finished my duties and dinner and rushed to continue reading the diary. I was determined to finish it before going to sleep. Flipping through the pages, I found

six more filled entries before a sketch. I started reading again:

The evening breeze refreshes me so much. I went out to enjoy some fresh air with a cup of tea. As I wandered with my mug in hand, I saw the same man in the garden, picking flowers for the beautiful lady beside him. I moved closer to get a clearer view. The old man, barely steady in his walk, was trying to bring a smile to her wrinkled, rosy cheeks. After giving her the flowers, he planted a kiss on her forehead. She smiled, and hand in hand, they walked away. I felt something warm stir within me, and my eyes blurred with tears. I stood there for a moment, thinking: If I ever got married, this man would be my ideal. His way of showing love has set a high standard in my mind. Even at such an age, people like him are examples of everlasting love. It doesn't matter who would be my wife—I would always serve her with my purest love, just like this man. I returned home, but the image of that couple wouldn't leave my mind. So here is what I saw: the most beautiful thing in the world.

Never Ending

In a cozy home, where memories lie,

An old couple sits beneath the sky.

Sharing a love that never fades.

Shining in all its shades.

Old souls wander from youth-to age.

Their love, a nice cherished page.

Close!

Close!
My eyes filled with tears. During my 25 years, I had never felt my parents' love in that way. I always knew it was something special, but no one had ever described it like that. I turned off the lamp and tried to sleep. My mind, however wouldn't let me do that. The entire experience kept swirling in my head. Despite all my efforts, a sense of emptiness haunted me. I tossed and turned for what felt like forever—15 times, to be exact. I switched on the lamp and sat up. My eyes were red and swollen. I took the diary from my side table and opened it again. I began scanning each empty page, I was about to put it back when a new page appeared, filled with words. My heart skipped a beat. There were four unread pages. I began reading:

Hey Zahra,

I stopped. My hands froze. I couldn't even move for a second.

How did he know my name?

A cold shiver ran through my body. My curiosity increased. I continued reading.

Hey Zahra,

I don't know why, but I believe that you'll read this diary. But if by chance you did, there would be something I really want to tell you. When I saw you for the first time and learned that you are the daughter of my favorite couple, I decided I would do anything to be with you. I'd fight death for you. Since the day I saw you, my heart hasn't rested. The day you passed by me, I stood in the that lingered behind you in the lane. I made up my mind to give you all my love, Zahra. I want to give myself to you, just as your father gave himself to your mother. I want to grow old with you, and I promise, I'll care you more than your father ever cared of your mother. Today is your first day at work—I saw you leaving. Your smile refreshed all my senses. Zahra! today, I will express my feelings to you. I want to make everything perfect in your world. In this life, the only thing I need is you, Zahra. Yes, I love you, and I promise I'll always be loving and caring.

Love, Faris

Pain-ting

"Two hundred thousand rupees, sir!" Chico announced. Chico is my assistant. His name is Allah Yaar. I call him Chico. He has been with me for twelve years. "Why does this girl keep selling her art so cheap?" I exhaled. "Doesn't she know the value of her paintings? I'd buy a canvas she painted for 100 million. Let her know her painting is sold and transfer her three hundred thousand rupees. Go get my cheque book." Chico got my cheque book, and I finished filling in the details. "You know the rules. Do not let her know my name. Give her cash and use a different name." Chico knew this well and never disappointed me. I dragged a small piece of paper from my pocket, and Chico handed me a pen. I wrote "Rose" on it, folded it in half, and handed it to him.

The next day, I woke up and went to the room where all my treasure lay.

I stood there alone. Paintings surrounded me everywhere. They were all Amal's. Every single painting, she made, I owned it. I stood up and took the painting that was resting on the stand. It was a sketch of a girl's face whose eyes were wide and a red liquid was pouring from her eyes. I brushed my finger across it. I love to do that. Then, I dragged my finger to the lower-left corner. The date I bought it. It was ten days ago. I dragged my hand to the

other bottom corner. There lay my favorite part. Her name "AMAL". Her lips were painted red below her name. I kept my finger there and closed my eyes for a moment, picturing her painted lips on this canvas. No one was allowed to enter that room except Chico. I used to cleaned it myself, I arranged all the paintings in a specific sequence.

Chico entered the room and stood behind me. I was interrupted by a beep on my phone. I had established a sanctity for that room. I respectfully returned the painting to its place, and rushed out of the room. I pulled my phone out of my pocket and hit the green button on the screen. It was an unknown number.

"Mr. Zaviyaar Ahmed?" a man asked in a heavy voice.

"Yes, I am," I replied.

"I am a representative from Grand City Properties, and we are pleased to inform you that the land you wished to purchase is now legally yours. The property is located at 15/B Canal Road's Main Market. You have already paid three hundred millions, and the remaining amount is seven hundred millions. The paperwork and remaining payment are due on Monday, October 17. Thank you, sir."

My eyes widened as I listened every single word. My heart raced, and I could hear every beat by my ears. I paused for a moment.

"Any questions, Mr. Zaviyaar Ahmed?" the man asked. "No, thank you!" I hung up. I smiled, and Chico also grinned, revealing his front-stained tooth. That was the piece of land I had been trying to buy for five months, regardless of the cost. It was in the main city. I replayed everything in my mind. Since I bought Amal's first

painting; I had dreamed of building a grand museum for her art. I had already hired a team of labourers to complete the building in four to six months. The only delay was the property papers. Chico patted my shoulder, and I gave him a grateful smile.

"Chico, I want this deed done as soon as possible," I said, facing him.

"I want you to take charge of the construction and the interior designs."

I had already selected every single detail. I trusted Chico that he would handle that. Chico had actually come to inform me about a new painting. I pulled out a small piece of paper and a pen from my pocket and wrote "TESORA." It’s a Spanish word meaning "treasure." She was truly a treasure for my life. I folded the paper and handed it to Chico. Chico laid my cheque-book in front of me.

"How much?"

I asked.

"1.7 million, sir," Chico said in a low tone. I signed a cheque for two millions, tore it from the cheque-book, and handed it to Chico. Twisting my pen between my fingers, I asked him,

"What's special about this one?"

"Nomination, perhaps," he explained.

"Her painting has been nominated for the 20 most creative Paintings of Asia 2024."

I muttered, "That's my girl."

"Get me that painting by the afternoon," I ordered Chico, and he rushed away. That girl never disappointed me. I would probably lose it the day she said "yes" to me. I couldn't wait for that moment. I had been waiting since morning to see the new painting. My excitement turned into worry as it was now midnight, and Chico was still away. He had promised to bring the painting by afternoon. My steps quickened as I paced across the garden lawn. The guards were all up. Some sat across the gate, and others surrounded the lawn's boundaries. They must have been wondering about my untimely loitering, but none dared to ask me. They had never seen me like that.

I kept glancing at the gate every second until I heard a horn from the other side. The guards opened the gate, and Chico's car drove in. I hurried towards him. He come out of the car with his face filled with disappointment. I held him by the shoulders.

"Chico, what happened?
"Is everything alright?
"Where's the painting?"

I bombarded him with questions. He opened his mouth and began.
"I went there with the cash," he started. I tried to calm myself and listened patiently.

He continued. "I went there to buy the painting, but as I arrived at her stall, another man approached and stood beside her."

"Another man?" I wasn't expecting that. I controlled my nerves and listened carefully.

"I stood and observed him. They talked for a while, and then he walked away. I continued my way to her and asked her to sell me the painting. She said she would love to sell it, but my..."

Chico stopped. I freaked out but still controlled myself.

"My husband and I have decided not to sell this painting."

I froze. A sinking feeling formed in the pit of my stomach. A tsunami of rage crashed through me.

I clenched my fists to regain control. "Chico, you told me she wasn't married. Who is that man?"

I leaned toward him.

"You know what? I'll destroy anyone who dares to touch my girl."

"Chico, listen, I need every detail of that man by tomorrow. I'll handle it myself!" I warned.

"Yes, sir!"

I went to my room. I didn't sleep for a second. As soon as daylight approached, I rushed out of the room. I overheard Chico talking to the guards.

"Yahya, you'll drive the cars. No matter how many times he says to leave him alone, don't. You four, follow his car. Make no mistakes!"

After me, Chico was the only one allowed to give orders to the servants. I stood there looking the guards open the gate.

"I'm texting you the details," he said. "They aren't married yet. They're getting married on Tuesday. I've sent you the venue and timings."

A wave of relief washed over me.

"Thank you," I said, giving him a smile to show I wasn't freaking out. I made my way to the porch.

The cars were ready. My driver sat in the front seat of my car, while the Revo was loaded with guards. I didn't resist them, maybe because I didn't trust myself. I trusted Chico more than myself at this point. I got into the passenger seat of my Porsche, and the driver started the car out of the main gate.

I gave him directions, and soon we stopped in front of a white house. I called a guard and whispered my instructions. He nodded.

I remained seated while the guard rang the bell. The door opened after a few seconds.

My mind lost control when I saw her open the door. She was an angel—straight from heaven. Her scarf didn't hide her face; it adorned it. I straightened my back. The guard engaged her in a brief conversation, and then it began. Two guards grabbed her hands, despite her cries and resistance. They put her in the back seat of my car and left. I opened my door, left my seat, and seated myself beside her. Her scarf was no longer on her head. She dropped it on the road during the struggle with the guards. I asked the driver to retrieve it for her. Her face was turning red with anger and pale with fear. I don't know why, but I was enjoying it.

She was crying and sobbing, but I didn't care. I told the driver to take us home.

I had never felt so blessed.

"Please let me go," she said with her soft trembling voice. Her beautiful hazel eyes were brimmed with tears.

'Did the guards try to hurt you?' I asked, though I already knew the answer.

"Where are you taking me? Who are you?" Another tear slipped down her flushed cheek.

'We're going home, Rose,' I said. The word "Rose" seemed to stir something in her mind.

Her voice soothed me. I stayed silent the whole way, onlyu listening to her.

The driver parked the car in the driveway. I asked her to get out of the car. She stared at me as if she would kill me with the fire flickering in her eyes. I grabbed her soft hand and helped her out. She stood still in front of the car; the fire was still burning in her gaze.

"I'm not going anywhere!" she yelled. "Please, take me home!" Another tear fell. I could die a thousand times just to hear her voice.

'You are safe here, princess. No one will touch you or even talk to you. It'll be just you and me, and I promise, we'll talk, and then I'll take you home.'

"How long?" she asked with her eyes wide like a child's. "Until I get all my questions answered."

I grabbed her hand and led her across the porch, down to the basement, and stood before the door to the room. I opened it, switched on the lights, and said, "Welcome to my heaven."

Her eyes widened, and her pupils dilated. I could clearly see her reaction when her jaw dropped. I expected that. She stood frozen, and I whispered in her ear. ‘I know this place feels small now, but that’s why I’m building a house for your paintings. My team will finish it in a few days.’

I dragged a chair over and seated her in it. Then I sat away from her. Her eyes were piercing my soul. Damn, she was gorgeous.

I forgot every single word I had planned to say to her. Her eyes were erasing my memory. Damn!

I tried to compose myself. The only thought running through my mind was that I loved her, and she was right in front of me. I would never let her go. "Can you please take me home?" Her innocent voice shattered me, and I suddenly felt like a monster.

‘Look, princess,’ I began, gathering my courage and grabbing her hand in mine.

"First of all, I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have done all that to you, but I was panic-struck when I heard about your marriage. I know I messed you up. I wanted to do something romantic. I fell in love with you the moment I saw you."

She kept her gaze lowered to her lap.

‘I love you, and I would do anything for you. I would destroy anyone who ever tried to touch you, and you should know that’ This time, she looked up, and I got nervous, thinking I had said something terribly wrong. "Mister, I don’t know who you are, and I don’t care about your love!"

She yanked her hand away and pointed a finger at me. ‘If you even think about touching Zayaan, you’ll see me dead the very next moment!’

His name was Zayaan, Chico had told me, but I hadn’t paid much attention. Now, just hearing her say another man’s name in front of me was driving me mad. I tried to grab her again, but she resisted.

‘I love you, Amal,’ I said.

"But I love him, and you’d better get that through your head," she snapped.

Her eyes locked onto mine as she leaned closer. ‘Don’t do this to me, Amal. Please! I’m nothing without you. I’d die if you left me.‘I begged, feeling like my existence had lost all meaning. She was the one controlling me now.

"Go ahead and die, then! I don’t care if you live or not. The only person I care about is Zayaan."

At that moment, I wanted to erase every single person named Zayaan from the world, so the only name on her lips would be mine.

‘Look, I’m damn serious about you! I’ll destroy myself if you say his name again.’

She leaned even closer, her eyes locked on mine. "Zayaan," she whispered.

I lost control, threw the chair behind me and kicked it. She clutched her ears and started screaming, but I couldn't stop. The name kept echoing in my mind. My feet crushed the chair beneath me, but I felt no pain. My hands lashed out, and the paintings in front of me fell to the ground. She kept screaming, begging me to stop, but I couldn't. A full-length mirror stood across the paintings. Another swing of my hand shattered it into pieces. I was losing my mind. I picked up a shard of glass and pointed it at her.

'You want me die?' I asked, with hollow voice. 'Now, watch me die.'

I pressed the shard against my wrist, and blood splattered everywhere.

The last thing I saw was Amal's face. She was crying, but I couldn't hear her. My vision blurred, and the world began to fade. My mind was still processing how I had fallen for someone whose eyes were no longer looking at me. I wanted to say something to her. I don't know if she was listening, but...

Farewell, my love!

Meet me where the sun kisses the rain, and the moon blushes shyly.

Tears of Yesterday

Seven months passed. It was December; the longest nights of the year with chill, cozy beds, and warm breaths. They met on Facebook. Everything was getting difficult. Long-distance relationships sometimes create anxiety of the highest order. Meeru and Essa did not see even a glimpse of each other. Voice calls and video chats happened, but looking into each other's eyes and being lost for a moment was all that they ever craved for.

After offering morning prayers, he used to recite the Quran. Essa learned the Quran by heart when he was 13 years old. But he was forgetting it slowly, which was not a good omen. Meeru decided to listen a part of it from him after morning prayers. Often, she fell asleep while he recited. His voice was melodious. But mostly she cried. It was not a cry; even she could not figure out whether it was by the effect of the verses. Meeru understood Arabic but not properly. While he read, her mind often stuck to a verse he often recited and started to weep with heavy breaths. Essa always waited for her text. It was his love language to wait for a prayer reminder from Meeru and then offer a prayer. Seven months passed; not even a single day passed when he did not wait for a prayer text from her, and she never disappointed him. She was always there to save him, and secure him. They even prayed Tahajjud (a prayer

prayed in the middle of the night; believed to bring Allah's blessings for their supplications).

The winter started, and both of them used to drop the call at 4 am and make ablution with cold icy water. With shivering hands, they made their prayers and duas, hoping that Allah would listen to them.

It was a Sunday morning. They were talking about their future when Essa's alarm started to ring. Meeru felt a vibration interrupting his voice. She asked him to get up, but he was feeling sleepy. "Please get up, love! We can't miss it." She begged. "Only five minutes, please!" he said, knowing she would never agree.

There was a complete silence, and then suddenly she started to call his name loudly. Essa wanted to talk, but the voice was so high that he couldn't make it. "Okay!" Essa finally said, and she stopped as if her ears were only waiting for this word.

She dropped the call, saying, "Love you, love you so much. Now bye."

Both of them offered the prayer and made long dua, wept and cried in front of Allah. After 20 minutes, both were again in their beds; eyes closed, sleepy voices, and amorous talks. That was beyond perfect. "You are my safest place ever. I can't even think of a world without you, Essa," she said. The time after Tahajjud and before Fajr (morning Prayer) was their favorite. Both of them burst out with everything good or bad about each other. Dreams, reveries; past, present and future, hopes and fears; all mingled invariably!

"Why are these nights so magical?"

"No! I think only the nights I spend with you are magical ," he added in an affirmative tone.

He used to call her "Fajr." He never called her name; even Meeru sometimes craved for her name to be slipped from his lips. She begged him even, but he refused.

"You are my morning. A good one. A good morning," he said, "Fajr" with stress. "I can even call you Esha (the last prayer offered at night), but I don't want to end a day with you. I just want to start every day with you that has no ending." She blushed for the 50th time, and she blushed the same she did after listening for the first time.

"I want you to be in my life forever. I just want to see your face every morning. I want to say good morning and stare at you for hours. There would be no goodbyes."

There intervened a deep silence between them; slight breaths could only be heard through the phones. She broke the silence finally.

"You know when one is in a state of complete mental and internal peace, one closes his eyes. It's a supernatural action; when one experiences some internal peace, one closes ones eyes unintentionally. It can be seen when one kneels in prayers. One doesn't feel oneself doing it intentionally. It seems a bit awkward telling, but when a kiss is given, the same thing happens," she said teasingly.

"You naughty girl!" he started to laugh but froze his mind for a minute at what she just said. The Imam started to call the Morning Prayer. He said, "It's been five hours and seemed like five minutes. Time flies when I am with you."

"AZAAN," she interrupted, and they both kept quiet. When it was over, Essa knew that she'd not wait for a second even, so he said in a hurry.

"Will meet you at the same after 20 minutes. Be on time; I'll be waiting."

He didn't listen even a single word from her and rushed away. She could hear his footsteps moving. She smiled and dropped the call.

Both said their morning prayers and returned. Not even a single sign of sleep was there.

"Are you sleepy?" he asked.

"No! And you?" she asked.

"I should be but I am not," she said with a soft sigh.

"That's my girl!" he said with the same smile. After a while, she started.

"I miss you so much. I haven't even seen you in person. How can one falls in love with someone so badly without even seeing one? And you know what I think? After all this, my faith in Allah has reached its extreme. Now I believe so much in love without seeing whether it is Allah or His person." She stopped. "But you are such a wonderful addition to my life that I can never even think of a life without you. Some people call it teenage fantasies, but I think it's not that thing. It's something spiritual."She exhaled heavily.

"I miss you so much, Essa." When she noticed no voice was coming from the other side, she returned to the call and saw it was muted by him. He only mutes a call when he has to cry. She waited for a while until a sobbing voice came from the other side.

"Can we meet? I mean, we should, but only if you want too." A sudden question that she was not expecting at all. A question which scattered her thoughts and stirred her mind.

"W-W-What?" She felt a jolt. "I want to see you, please. Is there any possibility? Can I just see a glance of you?"

“I’ll not even touch you; 7 feet away. Is it okay?” He paused. “Please.” His voice was heavy that time. She was just listening with closed eyes and tears rolling down her eyes and getting absorbed in pillow. “Please, Fajr.” His voice was heavy that time. It doesn’t deserve a “No.” “I miss you too! But that’s not the solution. How we’ll be able to return?” She resisted. “We will, Essa, but we—” he interrupted.

“Please, 5 minutes only. I’ll just look at you.” A silence dropped. “Please,” he was begging. “I’ll tell you in the morning.” She said. Both of them said goodbyes and went to sleep.

The next day was a bit busy. She left a message, “I’ll call you after dinner. At 9 sharp. Be there. And if you couldn’t, just let me know.” She was too busy again. Essa replied to the text with a big “Yes.”

She was a bit late. She called him at 9:15. He might be waiting. But he picked up her call on the first ring. After greetings, he immediately asked the question. “So which day have you decided?”

Meeru was not prepared for it and had not even decided yet as she couldn't find a single second throughout the day to think about it. After noticing the silence, he asked, “What about Wednesday? What are you up to?” After thinking a while, she said, “No, but—” he interrupted.

Wednesday, at 4, in the evening then.”

“Is it suitable for you?” He asked.

“Yes, that sounds right.”“I'll send you the address.

Okay?” He asked and got up from his seat.

"Yes," she said. He excused himself, "I have to go! An urgent piece of work. You just take care of yourself. My daisy. Bye."

He dropped the call the very next moment. She was still lying there unmoved, thinking about what just happened and also somewhere thinking of her Wednesday routine.

She was almost free, but it didn't seem right. The next two days were very busy, too. But somehow, both managed to pack some gifts for each other. He'd be traveling 20 kilometers.

Wednesday arrived—that day after her college classes—she began to get ready. She reached the place they had decided, but he was not there yet. Her hands were cold and shivering. She called him. He said that he'd be there in three minutes. She rested herself on a bench, finding enough time to make herself comfortable. She indulged herself completely in rummaging through her handbag when she noticed someone behind her. She heard sounds, perhaps a jacket or gloves. She didn't move an inch, her eyes closed until she was shaken when he placed his chin on her shoulder and whispered softly into her ear. His breath brushed against her skin, and a voice came, "Peace be upon you." He was also shivering; a cold wave of anticipation and excitement swept through her body.

It was the first time they had seen each other. She turned to face him. His eyes were pale and yellow, perhaps due to the long journey. His face was perfect, with a beard that seemed meticulously groomed and pink lips that appeared flawless. They kept gazing at each other, and time seemed to freeze. He saw the most beautiful girl ever. But a person becomes most beautiful when he is loved. In that moment, they were both undeniably most beautiful.

Essa's Fajar and Meeru's Essa. He was shivering so badly. Meeru leaned forward and held his hand. Everything in him stopped for a moment; he closed his eyes. The moment was profoundly perfect. They hardly spoke, only exchanged a few words.

She moved her hand to his collar and neck, gently caressing his cheeks before moving her thumb to his lips. He attempted a quick kiss, but she pulled her hand back.

A severe cough gripped her, and she started to breathe hard. He moved closer to her. The cough seemed to be very serious. He had noticed earlier that she was suffering from the flu, which was common due to the weather. She was shivering. He grabbed a bottle of water from his backpack and put it into her lips.

She struggled to overcome it. After five minutes, she got normalized, but her breaths were still labored. When she looked up at Essa, tears were rolling down his cheeks. She had never seen a man weeping. Why was he crying? It was just an ordinary cough. But she didn't usually feel that way; she had been experiencing such cough attacks for two days. Meeru calmed him and said, "I should leave now!"

Twenty minutes passed, yet she stayed with him. He didn't stop her, simply offering a sad goodbye. He was genuinely worried and anxious.

After she left, he put on his gloves, jacket, and helmet. He began his journey back; his heart was heavy with thoughts of what had happened to her. That was not ordinary or usual. The way she was shivering haunted him.

He drove quickly, nearly colliding twice due to overspending. His mind was racing to reach home and talk to her. He remembered to leave her a message urging her to visit the doctor before sleeping.

He took his phone out of his pocket and started typing the text, neglecting his speed. He was just about to hit the send button when his bike collided with a truck. The impact was catastrophic; everything smashed, crashed and scattered in seconds. He fell to the ground. His head throbbed as his eyes landed on the bags of gifts she had given him and his mobile phone. People gathered immediately at the scene. Someone yelled to call an ambulance, while another person called the ambulance. A voice cried out, "He's bleeding so much!" His eyes closed slowly, and everything vanished. His mind and senses shut down, leaving him in darkness.

As he slipped into another state, he began to see her. She was the most beautiful.

Meanwhile, Meeru arrived home in an extremely weakened condition. She could barely breathe. She collapsed onto the bed as everyone rushed to her side. She was taken to the hospital. On the way, she grew pale and blue due to air blockages in her chest. The doctor and nurses hurried her to the ICU, leaving her family standing outside. After twenty minutes, the doctor emerged to deliver a devastating news; she was in the fourth stage of severe pneumonia.

"We're doing everything we can, but her condition is critical," he said. "We have not seen such a severe case of pneumonia. We could not diagnose anything else." He paused. "She needs prayers." The doctor stepped aside. Everyone began to pray as Meeru's sister moved to call Essa, her hands were shaking and her eyes wet with tears. His phone was powered off. She tried several times but couldn't get an answer.

While everyone continued praying in the hospital, the doctor informed them that they were preparing for surgery, with ten percent chances of recovery.

The operation began, and the family's sorrows hung thick in the air. The doctor asked Meeru's father to sign some papers, a painful task for him indeed. He held one hand on his chest while tears kept on falling onto the paper as he signed.

"It will be a two-hour surgery," the doctor informed them. Those two hours dragged painfully. After two and half hours, the doctor emerged. The dreadful silence said everything. He removed his mask, whispered "I'm sorry," and walked away.

Her eyes were closed eyes Essa wished to kiss for a lifetime. Both of them closed their eyes for the last time; to be opened in another world.

"I was waiting for you, Fajar," a voice called. It was Essa. He lay in her lap, unable to see her. She caressed his head with her fingers.

His eyes were closed, but he felt every touch of her hand.

> "Thank you for everything, Fajar," he murmured. He closed his eyes and drifted into a long, peaceful sleep.

Wasted Hope

It was a dark night. It was as dark as hell. The lamp was still on. He was half asleep lying on his book, sitting on his table with closed eyes when his mother entered the room. The room was spacious with a wide window on one wall and a full-walled mirror on the other one. Every inch of the room was finely furnished and decorated. In one corner he was lying with the book wide open, and in the other corner some text books, helping guides, hand-written notes and solved papers scattered on the table.

'I told you to sleep dear.'

Ashir's mother said while she stepped inside. "Only three chapters are left, Mom" he replied. She moved towards him and held his hand into hers. Her heart quenched when she saw his red pale eyes. They bore a long burden of dreams. He wished to sleep but the sense to compete overwhelmed him. He was unable to close his eyes with a sense of peaceful sleep."Can you please stop all this, my love? We've told you a thousand times that we don't need you to be a doctor. Why are you entering into a race that is not meant for you." She extended her hands and cupped his face in them. "Your father has promised you that he'll invest his whole life to make you whatever you want." She was saying with wet eyes.

"Please stop it, Ashir. Look at yourself. You are wasting yourself. We don't want anything from you except your health." She looked at him with the hope that he'd understand what she was trying to say. She held him by his hands and made his way towards bed. She thought he was getting her point of view. But it wasn't until she left the room and he again rushed towards the table. It was his medical college admission test. He had been up all the night preparing for it.

He was on the table with his head on the half-opened book when his mother awoke him up. He stood up quickly, saw the clock and rushed towards the bathroom to get ready. He said a rushing goodbye to his dad when he called him back. He turned and sat across him. His father patted him on his shoulder and uttered. "Don't worry, if you wish to join medical profession, I'll buy you a hospital in the main city." He smiled and bragged too. Ashir had a contrary mind. He wanted to do it on his own. He secured first position throughout his academic career. But now, it was not the time to think back anymore because he was getting late. He rushed towards the door where the driver was waiting for him. He showed up in the front seat with two heavy books.

It was the entry test to secure admission into medical colleges and the result was to be announced the very next day in the evening. He got 93% marks in intermediate and it was the last step towards his success. He was confident and expected a lot from himself. A resounding success was waiting for him and this thought kept him awake till late at night. He did not expect a failure. The driver was ordered to wait outside. After 15 minutes, he got into the examination hall and was surrounded by a dreadful smell. He was a little exhausted and a mild headache overtook him. The examiner started to distribute the question papers

and answer sheets. The paper was to be solved in three and half hours with 200 multiple-choice questions. The answers were to be filled on an optical answer sheet. He solved the paper in just fifty minutes. The headache was continuously pinching him while he was filling the bubbles. Perhaps it was due to sleeplessness, he thought.

In the evening of the same day, the key to answers was released. He had his question paper in his hand. He matched each question right with a big smile on his face. He was racing his fingers through every question with one eye on the paper and the other on the mobile phone on which the key was opened. After getting through the key, he ran towards the hall towards his mother. He grabbed her from the back and surrounded her with his arms. She turned and hugged him with affection. "I know that you'll make it, my dude." They stood face to face for a while. He was excitedly telling her everything about the test, the admission criteria and the university. After a long talk, he went to his room. He was tired but the sense of coming happiness diminished his tiredness.

After some time he felt dizzy. He crawled to his bed and was about to sleep when a strange thought flashed his mind. That made all his happiness vanish in seconds.

"The answer to question 22 was 'C' and to question 23 was

'D' but I filled 23 'C' which was 22's answer and didn't revise the question numbers."

"Was that my mistake or am I just getting mad? I should sleep now." And in no time he slept deep. He woke up at 3. The final result was to be announced at 5 pm sharp. He helped himself out of the bed but could not. He laid down again. The thought from the last night again rushed through his head and he felt his head frozen. What if his doubts

were true? What if he had made such mistakes? His mind swirled and scattered when the door knocked and he saw his father coming in. He pulled a chair across him and seated himself. ”Your mom was telling me that you would rock the MCAT.” He bragged. “Yes! But it was not that well.” He said. He was still confused whether or not he had made the mistake. His mind was reclining towards doubts but his heart was on the contrary. Soon his father left the room. He didn’t listen much to his father’s talks.

It was till 4.00 in the afternoon, he didn’t come out of his room. It was 5.00 pm when the result was to be announced. His head was still spinning. He couldn’t get out of the bed. He lay down again in his bed and fell asleep. After a while, he opened his eyes wide and started to look for his phone. It was away on the table. He saw the time. Just five minutes were left. His eyes froze on the screen. He counted the minutes. Every minute seemed to be an hour. Exactly at 4:58, he logged into the website. He spent the next two minutes staring at the portal. At 5 the result popped on the screen. He scored 312 out of 500. He started to lose his senses. He saw that all his hopes vanishing. It felt like a nightmare. The worst thing had happened to him. The only thought that popped into his mind was his mom and dad who would be there in two minutes. He rushed towards the door, pushed it close with a thud, walked here and there, tried to control himself but failed. He walked towards the phone and threw it on the floor with all his force. He could not understand anything. He grabbed the medicines from his side table and ate a handful of sleeping pills. Nothing happened. He was about to have another handful of pills when he started to lose his senses. He felt his head spinning. He heard the door beaten, his mother was on the other side crying and shouting. He felt his body falling to the ground. His head hit the corner of the table and he felt a dark shadow around him. The only thing he remembered

was his mother who, somehow or the other, opened the door and rushed towards him crying loudly. The driver took him to the car and drove to the hospital in no time. The doctors rushed towards them and took Ashir to the emergency room. His dad also reached there. He was weeping with swollen eyes. Both his mom and dad stood for forty minutes until the doctor showed up and tried to explain.

"We tried a lot but his heart failed to respond. Sorry! We couldn't make it." He was sharing the shocking news, shaking his head with sorrow and moving forward leaving them behind.

Both of them rolled to the ground, weeping, crying and shouting but nothing was left. Their only son, their whole life, their cause of happiness vanished in front of their eyes. Even their wealth could not bring their son back.

Unwritten Ending

Yahya was under training at Pakistan Military Academy Kakul. He had been selected after passing a series of rigorous ability tests, and it was a dream that came true for him.

Six months passed, and now the day came for him to return home. He was a bit tired, excited, and nervous. He woke up and got himself ready. Clad in a brown uniform adorned with badges on both shoulders, a gold medal gleaming around his neck, he opened the door of his room and stepped out into the large ground. His parents were waiting for him. The vast ground was covered in green grass, trimmed to perfection—much like a soldier's haircut.

He approached the ground with his single piece of luggage, issued to every soldier. He neared his parents, who were standing in a corner, speaking softly to one another. They turned to face him. Their eyes were blurred with tears of pride, their emotions were too overwhelming to hold back. In front of them stood their tall, clean-shaven son, dressed as a senior officer. It was their Yahya, their only son.

He took a step forward, saluted, and pulled his father into a tight hug. He greeted them both with a warm smile, but no words were spoken.

On their way home, they traveled through the narrow streets of the city. The road opened up to a heap of garbage on the corner, with children playing on both sides. They took three turns—one to the right, and two to the left—with each turn, the streets grew more narrow. Finally, they arrived their home, a place with an ancient look, worn out but cherished.

It was a picture of poverty, but at the same time, it reflected the hard work of his father, who had worked as a clerk at a public sector college.

The paint was peeling off, the door was unvarnished and all its original wood showed. A classical lock hung proudly, as the sole protector of their home.

They opened the door and entered. Yahya's childhood memories swirled before his eyes. Now, as a soldier, this humble house no longer seemed to match his polished uniform.

He shook off the thought and hurried to his room, while his mother went to the kitchen, and his father settled into a chair—its edges broken and worn. Yahya opened a drawer, searching for his mobile phone. He turned it on, his mind racing. All he could think about were the messages. *She must have waited for me for so long*, he thought.

As soon as his phone restored the internet connection, the screen flooded with notifications. The phone froze, vibrating non-stop for nearly 15 minutes. It displayed 2,160 messages.

Is she mad? he murmured to himself. Without reading a single one, he immediately hit the call button. The phone rang once, and to his surprise, she answered immediately.

"Are you crazy?" he blurted out.

She inhaled deeply and, in a trembling voice, started, "Assalam o Alaikum."

"Walaikum Assalam," he replied. "I'm asking you—are you mad? Who sends this many messages?"

"You are the light that rushes through my scars," she said softly, "and didn't this light deserve every hour of my life? I did nothing. I just wanted to let you know that I never forgot you."

Yahya hung up without saying another word and opened their chat. He was utterly shocked. Every message was sent at exactly 6:26 pm; every day for the past six months.

Is she real?" he whispered, scrolling through the messages, with tears rolling down his cheeks. He couldn't stop them. He lay on his bed, holding the phone close to his heart, and cried until sleep took ove him.

Abeera belonged to a wealthy family, yet she worked as a school teacher, driven by her passion for education. Her father neither needed the money nor wished his only daughter to work so hard, but she had convinced him to let her do what she wanted.

She sat on a bench at the school playground, waiting for her driver. Her phone flashed with a notification—the messages was received, and a smile spread across her face. She was momentarily distracted as her driver called, signaling it was time to leave.

She arrived home, freshened up, and picked up her phone to call Yahya.

It rang three or four times before he answered, his voice groggy, revealing that he had been asleep. She felt a pang of guilt but didn't apologize. Time and memories rushed back to the days when he wasn't there.

"Hello, Daisy," his voice purred, half-awake, making her heart flutter. She felt like she could die hearing that voice. Abeera sat on the school playground bench again, her heart racing, waiting for Yahya. The cold breeze caressed her soft face and toyed with her caramel hair. She kept her eyes on her phone's black screen, waiting for his call. He was coming to pick her up. The last time they met was like a lifetime ago. The last time they met was before he had even applied for the military.

She closed her eyes, tried to feel the wind and remember the warmth of his hands—their touch, impossible to forget. Her thoughts were interrupted as the screen lit up with his name, accompanied by a red heart. She hit the green button immediately.

"There are 20 seconds," his voice teased.
"Okay," she replied, excitement bubbled inside of her.

Abeera stood, adjusting her white kameez, which fell gracefully to her knees, and her trousers, neatly tailored. Her minimal butterfly-shaped earrings glinted in the light, and she wore khussas.

Yahya managed a car on rent and headed towards her school. She stood on the gate waiting for him. He was seated in the driving seat. He removed his sunglasses. His

hand gripped the steering wheel, firm and controlled, a man to die for.

“Step in, cutie,” he said in a mesmerizing voice, one that could never be refused.

Abeera slid into the passenger seat, her heart thumping as she glanced at him, his handsome features making her blush. Her pink cheeks deepened to red, and she could feel her pulse racing. She nervously played with the chain around her neck, a common habit when excited or anxious.

Girls do things like this—twisting rings, rubbing necklaces—when nervous; and she did.

He realized that Abeera was nervous, and quickly took her hands. Sweaty and cold as ice. Not ice really like SNOW. Soft and cold. He placed his hand on her thigh fir a few seconds. They drove to a restaurant. He parked the car in the Parking area. “Stay there” he ordered. He crossed the car and stopped in front of her door, clicked it open and laid his hand in front of her.

She had not thought of it. Sweat drops formed in her hairline. A gesture she had only reached in books and seen in movies.

Abeera plotted her hand in his. A wave of pleasure and a feeling defined as pride rushed through every cell of the body. She stepped out and he kept on clutching her hand. They walked into the restaurant. He slid a chair and got her seated.

Samar, Abeera's first cousin, entered the scene. Their families had once decided they should marry, but Abeera and her parents despised him. He had quit his studies,

spoiled by extravagant money and a carefree lifestyle, spending his time with boys and girls. He was a bad influence.

That day, Samar was out with his friends, casually scrolling through his phone at a restaurant. One of his friends commented, “Isn’t that Abeera?”

Samar turned sharply, his eyes narrowing as he saw her, hand-in-hand with Yahya. Fury erupted within him, and he felt his blood boil. He stood up, knocking his chair back, and stormed towards them.

Yahya excused himself to the restroom, and Samar seized the opportunity. Without a word, he grabbed Abeera by the arm and dragged her out of the restaurant, pulling her to the parking lot. She resisted, screaming and throwing punches, but he didn’t flinch. He threw her into his car with a rough shove, locking the door as he got into the driver’s seat. Her cries fell on deaf ears.

The car screeched to a halt in front of her house. He pulled her inside, his grip tight and unrelenting. He shoved her onto the couch, his rage unspoken but palpable.

Anger flickered in her eyes like fire. Those brown eyes were full of rage.

“How dare you grab me like this? Who are you to me?” Anger surged through Samar's body, bursting forth like a volcano. Involuntarily, he bent his body over hers, their eyes nearly touching. He started,

“How dare you? How do you even dare to look at someone else? I own you, and it’d be better if you accept it as soon as possible.”

He snapped away, taking a long breath, both hands on his waist, back facing her. Trying to digest his anger, he calmed himself down.

Tears rolled down Abeera's face, her hands trembling, thoughts flashing through her mind like a raging storm. *What just happened? What would Yahya be thinking about me?* She pictured him in her mind, running here and there, searching for her.

Samar sensed her sobbing. He turned around instantly and knelt in front of her. Gently, he grabbed her hands gently and began rubbing them with his fingers. She couldn't believe what was happening. A second ago, he was yelling at her. The person who never used to lower his head was now kneeling in front of her, his gaze lowered in submission.

Sunlight streamed through the window, illuminating his sharp jawline.

'He was beautiful. No, perhaps this side of him was beautiful,' she thought. But gazing at him like that might be a betrayal to Yahya. She recoiled her hand from his.

Samar looked up, his eyes filled with tears. He started, "Please don't hurt me, Abeera," he paused.

"I never felt helpless like this. I'm so sorry for my behavior and what I did to you. I would not have acted that way, but seeing you with someone else—my mind couldn't accept it. I freaked out and messed up. I should respect your space and your people. I'm sorry, Abeera." She snapped, *If Yahya had never come into my life, I would die for this person for sure. He was heartbreakingly handsome at this moment, begging*.

Something flashed in his mind, and he stood up and walked out of the door. But for the first time, Samar with dropped shoulders was walking out.

She remained there for a while, her mind swirling, before moving to her room.

Opening the door, a sweet smell of freshly made breakfast greeted her. She reached her side table and saw a tray with finely cut fruit and a plate beautifully arranged with two slices of bread and a fried egg. A glass of apple juice was also there on the side. Though it wasn't breakfast time, the sight made her mouth water.

Feeling thirsty, she lifted the glass and took a long sip. The juice soothed all the dryness Samar had aroused in her body. Just as she was about to put the glass back, her eyes widened. A piece of paper lay under the glass, folded precisely hidden beneath its bottom. She grabbed the note, opened it, and started reading.

Dear Abeera,

It pains me to write this. But I am writing just to let you know that I love him more than anyone else in this world. And you know what the only person in his heart should be me. I don't want him to love you. Your death will not hurt you as much, but death hurts. This was the only possible way I could take over his heart.

With love,

YOUR DEATH

Her vision blurred as she read the letter, her body felt heavy like a cloud descending upon her bed, and she collapsed onto the side of it. Her hands and feet trembled, she tried to rattle herself awake, but she couldn't make a single move. Everything went dark. She lay there unmoving, white liquid flowing from her mouth. Her face, once the dawn of life, now dimmed like the setting dusk. Her face turned pale. It

wasn't the right time for her to go; she had many things unresolved. The two men she had left behind were both desperately her. Perhaps, it was better to die than to fall into an endless love fight. Maybe this was the end of her story.

She went for a peaceful sleep.

Meanwhile, Sara rolled her car out of the parking near Abeera's house.

She drove toward a long route that led to the motorway.

She won.

Thoughts flashed through her mind.

'Congratulations, Sara. Now Samar is all yours. No one will dare snatch him from you.'

A bragging smile spread across her face, and the drive continued.

A peaceful drive.

She went for a peaceful sleep.

Meanwhile, Sara rolled her car out of the parking near Abeera's house.

She drove toward a long route that led to the motorway.

She won. Thoughts flashed through her mind.

'Congratulations, Sara. Now Samar is all yours. No one will dare snatch him from you.'

A bragging smile spread across her face, and the drive continued.

A peaceful drive.

Echoes in the Fog

Leila saw her husband in sky-blue shorts standing in front of the kitchen shelves, silently manipulating the utensils. She struggled to rise from the bed but couldn't do so. She kept her back against the pillow with her gaze fixed on him. Tears were falling from her eyes. They were as clear as water.

Qais heard the sound, turned around, and smiled. He grabbed the scattered plates from the shelves. He was bearded man with a tall and stout stature. He set the plates on the bed in front of her, saying at the same time, "Oh Leila, be brave!" He tried to pull her back from her distant wanderings in her imagination. When Qais looked into her eyes, he saw the tears rolling down her cheeks and falling into her lap. He kept silent for a few seconds, closed his eyes for a moment, and resumed speaking, "You are so bold. Gather your courage. I always find you patient and steadfast. You are a source of inspiration for me." He uttered those words and continued to caress her cheek with his fingers. She tried to get up from her bed, but her frail legs did not allow her. He supported her, taking her shoulders in his hands, and slowly came closer, gently kissed her eyelids. His lips brushed against hers; she screamed, "Go! Just go away! Don't do this; it will be difficult for both of us." She kept on screaming incessantly and unconsciously. She hurled the plates onto the marble

floor. There was a loud clatter and jingling. The plates rolled down and away; a few broke, while others cracked. Qais moved toward her gently in an attempt to soothe her. He wished her to be calm and cool. He tucked her head against his chest and wept, tears fell inside. He laid her back down in her bed and cleared the mess from the floor, but she sat as mute as a statue in some ancient museum; hair disheveled, eyes sunken, lips dry, cheeks pale, eyebrows unkempt, and forehead slightly wrinkled. Her lips parted, as if they were there for centuries. In a low bass, she said, "Don't go." He quietly gripped her from her waist. He wanted to come as close as possible to listen the beats and thumps of her heart. She was coy and shy; attempted to remain composed in her deliberation. A desire to be near Qais and a sense of repulsion from him were like Newton's third law of motion; nothing transpired. The resultant feeling was sweeter than honey but more poignant than poison.

She recalled the days when he used to call her a *fairy*, and she, in turn, pronounced him, in a rising tone, *handsome*. Those were the good old days—the days of early union and matrimony. The desire for a child was natural, but they were not in a hurry. They wanted to have some years of joy and fervor. The years flew away, taking all those intimate moments with them. The tick-tock of the clock never ceased. Days passed. Weeks moved on. Months elapsed. Year went on; one year twined with another like beads on a rosary. Five years flew away like a dream of one night—a dream that began happily but was ending as a nightmare.

Qais was diagnosed with the last stage of cancer a year ago. She requested the doctors to keep it a secret from his husband. She didn't wish him feel hopeless. She thought it best to bear the burden of despair in her own heart. One night, Qais discovered the doctor's findings in a suitcase in

the back room. He felt a sense of helplessness. He felt the shadows of death looming over him. He wanted to cry out loud, but could not do so; he did not wish to inflict any further pain on Leila. He decided to remain silent. He carried on pretending that everything was normal.

One day, while making a salad in the kitchen, Leila collapsed onto the floor. She remained in the hospital for more than a week and was diagnosed with schizophrenia. After that, nothing was normal. Everything changed. She could not behave wifely; she started screaming whenever he tried to get close.

Abnormality became unusual and unpredictable. A sense of loss haunted her. She often thought of getting rid of it, but was powerless to resist. She could not stop. She didn't want to lose him. He was the pulse of her life. She felt breathless without him. Qais, too, was possessive. He was helpless against his own disease and against Leila's unusual behavior. He, sometimes, tried to help her regain her composure and confidence, but to no avail. For the time being, she looked sane and smiling. Most of the time, she behaved strange and odd.

One day, Qais took her to a nearby garden. They sat there for a long time, recalled their first meeting in a conference hall, long walks in the garden, and leisurely evenings in the café opposite to the admin block of the university.

Past is past; we can just think of it; we can't redo it. Present is present; we have to live with it. Future is future; it is out of our reach. Every present moment carries echoes of past. The distant past holds pleasures; the closer we get to the present, the more painful the memories become. Sometimes, present feels so heavy and unbearable that we seek refuge in future—future that we can grasp through our

imagination. For Leila and Qais present was poignant, and future seemed bleak.

One day, Leila was in the kitchen making a fried egg when everything stopped suddenly. Her heart skipped a beat, and her mind dissolved into oblivion. The world around her began to whirl. She could not hold onto anything around her. No more pain. Memories faded from her sight. It was Qais; only Qais whose presence she felt. She could not stop screaming. Qais turned pale; his eyes rolled back, and his body, too, became soulless. He uttered a long and loud sigh. She screamed so hard, but no one was there to hear her. No one was there to hear them. Leila cried, "My love! Don't go, please. It hurts me. I can't live without you.

"Please stay alive."

She cradled his swaying body in her lap. He fell down like a felled tree under a single blow of an axe.

She kept screaming until her voice dissolved. She felt her body grow weightless. She collapsed onto the floor, with Qais's lifeless body on top of her. Both fell together in a single fall. Qais and Leila; Leila and Qais. They held each other's hands, their faces turned toward one another. There was not a single sound in the room; neither the beats of hearts, nor the whistle of breaths. It was an end; it was a beginning—a journey down to a new road towards the eternal downtown.

A Dark Sun

“She is at her last stage of cancer. A month or two is all she has.”

The doctor was speaking hopelessly to her mother while Ella waited outside after undergoing all the tests the doctor had recommended. Her mother cried with no voice. Her eyes were full of unshed tears. She could not stop herself from asking the doctor some nonsense questions, but the doctor knew that such questions were normal. He replied patiently. A fear weighed heavy on her nerves: "How would I tell Ella? What about Aziz and Tariq?" There was a mountain before her to cross. "How would she live without her?" The doctor continued to encourage her. Somehow, she helped herself to rise from her seat and walk outside with trembling feet.

Ella kept asking questions again and again, but all in vain. As they walked home, silence became a third companion with them. As Elan, her mother, opened the door and found that Tariq was not at home, she felt that it was an opportunity—perhaps to find suitable words to tell her son about his sister’s illness. Elan rushed towards her room and locked the door. Ella grew curious and sat on the couch near her mother’s room, waiting for the door to open. She was suspicious of her mother’s meeting with the doctor.

After half an hour, she opened the door when the telephone bell rang. Elan walked towards the phone at the other corner of the hall where both of them could not see each other. Ella ran towards her mother's cupboard because she knew her mother had kept the reports there. She shuffled the clothes and found the file. She quickly opened it, rustled the pages, and hurriedly closed it. She put the file where it was and left the room before Elan returned.

Ella locked herself in her bathroom and wept until her tears were dry. She felt so helpless. She returned to her mother's room. Elan was lying in her bed; lost in her thoughts that she did not feel Ella's presence. Her thoughts were interrupted when the doorbell rang, and Ella went to answer it. Suddenly, she heard Ella's voice.

"When did you come back from your trip, and why didn't you inform us about your arrival?"

"I just wanted to give you people a surprise." It was Aziz.

Ella followed him after closing the door when he came towards Elan and greeted her with a soft 'salaam'. He sat near her while Ella left to make tea.

Aziz began, "Why are you looking so frail, *khala*?"

Aziz was Elan's sister's son, whose mother and father died in an accident, and he was living alone in his house in the next street. He was engaged to Ella at the time when his parents were alive. The ceremony had been full of joy—a joy that was the only cherishing thing in the running phase of his life.

Elan replied, "It's nothing, dear. Just some tiredness, perhaps. I'll be okay after some rest."

"Okay, *khala*, you get some rest while I talk to Ella about her studies and tell her about my trip," he said.

"Sure, dear. Khuda hafiz!" she answered. She turned her back, closed the door, and turned off the light. Elan sank into the blanket with tears in her eyes.

Ella set table as Aziz came and sat down. Ella sat near him.

He asked, "Why is she so depressed?"

Ella shrugged. "No idea. Maybe she's just restless."

Aziz continued, "I'm not feeling good about this, Ella. Is everything alright with her, with you? And where's Tariq? Is he okay?"

"He's out with his friends," Ella replied. "He said he'd be a bit late today."

Aziz sipped his tea and suddenly remembered something, patting his coat pocket.

"Oh! I forgot," he said, taking something out.

"I have a gift for you, Ella," he said.

Ella smiled, her curiosity piqued. "What is it?" she asked eagerly.

"Close your eyes first," he said excitedly.

"It's a surprise, isn't it?" she said, closing her eyes and spreading her hands in front of him. He held her hand tightly and slipped something onto her finger. She felt her left hand's finger weighed by something. Ella opened her eyes to see an elegant ring shining on her finger, an ocean-

colored stone protected by silver prongs. It fit perfectly, as if it had been carved just for her.

“Do you like it?” he asked, holding her hand.

“I love it, Aziz,” she said.

Tears rolled down Ella’s cheeks. He wiped them away with his fingers and planted a kiss on her cheek.

“I love you, Ella,” he continued. “You know you’re everything to me. You are the vein that connects my heart to my brain. I wish you a happy life forever. I have nothing in this world except you, Ella!”

Ella began sobbing, which made him grip her hand tighter. He searched her face for answers. She broke the silence.

“I have something to tell you, Aziz,” she said, with the tears streaming down her face.

“Yes, Ella, I’m here for hundred nights if you need me.”

“You have to be brave. It may feel like the end, but it’s not your end.”

Aziz froze, his heart was pounding as he stared at her. She looked down searching for the words, then finally spoke.

“I have a short life ahead, Aziz. May be two or three months.”

Aziz was stunned. He seemed to lose his hearing for a moment. His lips moved, but no sound came.

“I have got cancer, Aziz,” she said.

Aziz’s heart froze for a moment.. “It’s permeating in my blood,” she added, looking away, unable to face him. She knew he was crying—Aziz, who had never cried in front of anyone, even at his parents' funeral. But now, this was different. It broke him.

Everything seemed unreal to him. He felt as if the ground had disappeared beneath his feet. He stood up abruptly, said nothing, and rushed toward the door. Ella called after him, but he slammed the door behind him. She left everything untouched on the table and retreated to her room. She lay on her bed, crying uncontrollably.

"I don't want to lose him, Allah. I don't want to go yet. Please, Allah! Give me some time. Not for myself but for Aziz, for my mother, for Tariq. Help them bear this loss."

The following night was unbearable for her. Sleep evaded, as if a heavy stone were there on her chest. She tossed and turned, unable to breathe. Finally, at five in the morning, she rose for morning prayer.

Aziz, too, continued to weep all alone in his room. He kept on crying and praying in a loud voice but there was no one to hear him but Allah. Only Allah was sitting above. Only Allah was the best to console and heal Ella's pain. A man does not cry in front of others when he is in grief. He needs a dark place to shed his tears. He yelled and punched the ground, pulled his hair, but nothing helped. He spread his hands upward and began to pray with some sacred verses.

"How will I live without her, O Allah? You took my parents, and I endured it. I never complained. But, O Allah! Not Ella! I can't live without her. I'll die too. I have no one else in this world. I know You are listening. Please, don't take her away from me!"

The night passed in darkness until the call for morning prayers resounded from a nearby *masjid*. He staggered to his feet, shouted and cried incoherently. He seemed losing his senses. All his energies seemed to expire soon. He was quite unaware of the consequences for what he was going to do. He was more than a mad. He punched the mirror,

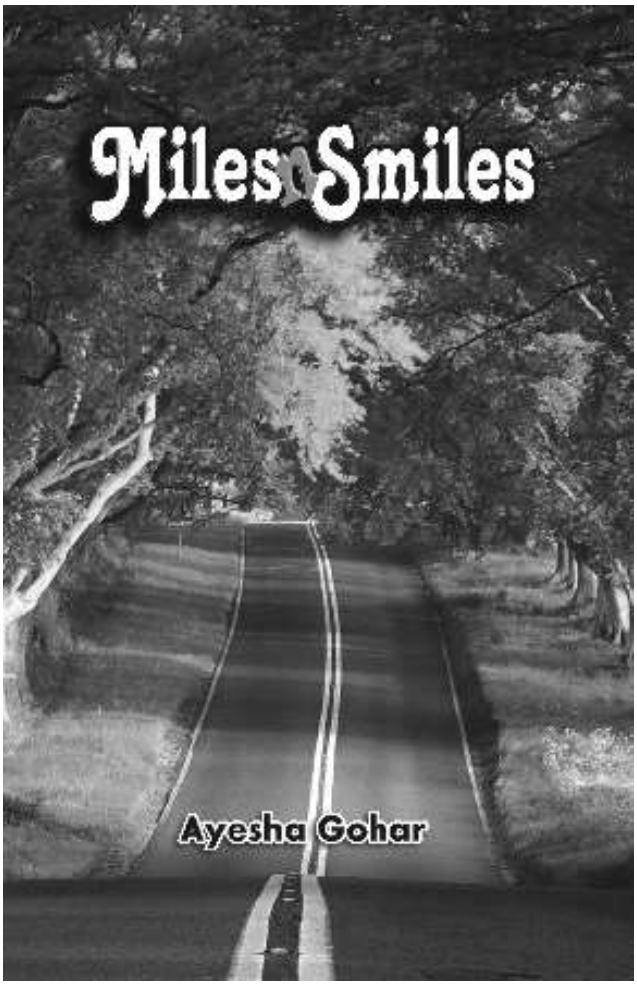
shattered it into shreds. He took a shred of the broken mirror and slashed his left wrist. A streak of blood emerged, and he felt his body grew weightless as it collapsed onto the broken pieces of glass. Blood surged from his open wound, and his body hit the ground. His voice faded; he fainted, as though he were walking down an endless corridor. The world around him darkened, but in that darkness, he felt as if he were not alone. Someone's head rested on his chest, and someone's body lay in his lap. Ella was there with him, for him. He was moving his fingers through her hair gently.

After hearing the *Azaan,* Ella rose from her bed and performed ablutions. While she was crossing the washroom door, her head spun. She barely managed to balance herself and reach her bed, but her body stumbled. She collapsed onto the floor. Her vision blurred, and the world around her disappeared forever and ever.

Ella's Aziz and Aziz's Ella were now bound together eternally; their hands entwined, never to be separated again. He heard himself whisper, "Ella, I've got to tell you something." She didn't respond. He began to speak softly:

Let's dive into the oceans
Let's soar in the skies
Let's create a new world
Where no one rises or dies
A world of utter silence
Void of all hues and cries
A world of Aziz and Ella
A world with no goodbyes.

By the same author



ayeshagohar

aishagohar2004@gmail.com

I wish to control my dream's flight,
To be with you in every night.
Your presence, my cure, my delight,
In your gaze, my heart takes flight.

If dreams were real, I'd choose to stay,
By your side, where stars hold sway.
Lay my head on your lap, so bright,
Counting stars, whispering in the night.

In your heart's warmth, find my place,
The world dissolves in your embrace.
With every breath, a love so deep,
In your arms, my soul will keep.

To your heart, I'd softly submit,
"The moon's beautiful, isn't it?"
And as the silver lights the sky,
In your love, I live and die.

The moon's beauty, a wondrous sight,
With you, my love, everything feels right.
In dreams, in life, in every way,
By your side, I wish to stay.

Dureshahwar Cheema

ISBN : 978 969 281 05 8